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Security Council

Seventy-second year

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Thursday, 27 July 2017, 10.15 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Liu Jieyi	(China)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Lambertini
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Sadykov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016) (S/2017/623)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016) (S/2017/623)

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting. Ms. Mueller is joining the meeting via video-teleconference from Amman.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/623, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016).

I now give the floor to Ms. Mueller.

Ms. Mueller: On behalf of Mr. Stephen O'Brien, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to brief the Council on the latest humanitarian developments in Syria. As you mentioned, I am speaking from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Amman.

Earlier today, I had the opportunity to visit the Azraq refugee camp, the second largest in Jordan after the Zaatari camp. About 35,000 Syrian refugees are living there, with many of them having been there for several years. Most of them are women and children. About a quarter of the refugees are originally from Aleppo, and nearly 20 per cent are from Homs. My visit left me with many impressions.

First, it made clear the level of the generosity and hospitality shown by Jordan and other neighbouring host countries, whose local authorities and communities have welcomed the influx of Syrian refugees, despite the pressures it has put on their own resources. Secondly, I saw the tremendous work being done by the humanitarian organizations whose programming enables families not just to survive but to lead dignified lives in the most difficult conditions. Most of all, however, I was inspired by the incredible hope and strength of the people I met, despite the terrible circumstances that have been forced on them. Their message was clear, and I would like to pass it on to the Council today. What they want, more than anything, is for the guns to fall silent and the conflict to end, and to be able to go home when it is safe to do so.

The hope and strength in Azraq are replicated across Syria — a remarkable fact considering that daily life remains dangerous and desperate for millions of people inside the country. While we have continued to see a drop in the violence in some areas since the 4 May memorandum on de-escalation, particularly in recent weeks in Dar'a governorate, the humanitarian and protection situation remains extremely difficult for civilians in many parts of the country. In the besieged area of eastern Ghouta, in rural Damascus, and the Jobar neighbourhood in the city of Damascus, military operations have started again.

In early and mid-July, air strikes and shelling on the towns of Ein Tarma and Hazzeh reportedly killed and injured several people. A local market in the besieged town of Kafr Batna was shelled on 16 July, killing or injuring many civilians. On 19 July, mortar shelling on the Harasta hospital in a north-eastern suburb of Damascus reportedly injured one person and damaged the medical facility in another reminder that the scourge of attacks on civilian infrastructure continues unabated.

Despite the announcement on 22 July of a ceasefire for eastern Ghouta, we have received reports of air strikes on Irbin, Douma, Zamalka and Otaya towns in the past three days that have killed or injured scores of civilians. Urgent effort is needed to de-escalate the situation, and we call on the parties to ensure the protection of civilians and unimpeded humanitarian access. In Idlib, infighting among non-State armed groups and designated terrorist groups in several towns over the past week has caused civilian casualties and led to rising tensions. On 18 July, four people were killed in a car-bomb attack in Armanaz town, and many

more incidents have been reported. Some humanitarian partners have had to suspend activities as a result.

The Bab Al-Hawa crossing point on the Turkish border — a lifeline for civilians in north-western Syria — was reportedly closed owing to the fighting and insecurity on the Syrian side of the border from 19 to 25 July, although humanitarian and commercial shipments have since resumed. The situation in areas of north-western Syria held by non-State armed groups remains extremely worrying, particularly given the high level of need among approximately 1 million displaced people living in the area, including many from formally besieged areas.

Operations countering Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) continue in Raqqa governorate. Heavy fighting and air strikes continue to result in civilian casualties and injuries. For example, reports indicate that dozens of civilians were killed and injured as a result of air strikes and shelling in July. Large-scale displacement also continues to be recorded with more than 30,000 people displaced since 1 July, bringing the total to more than 200,000 since 1 April in Raqqa governorate.

Significant protection concerns remain for those displaced, particularly in terms of freedom of movement outside of the camps in which they are being hosted. Humanitarian conditions are also very difficult for those who are displaced, particularly with temperatures approaching 50°C. An estimated 20,000 to 50,000 people remain inside Raqqa city, which is now encircled, and their situation is perilous. There is no way for them to get out. Civilian movement out of the city remains extremely difficult owing to the presence of mines and other unexploded ordnance, as well as shelling, sniper activities and air strikes. As military operations continue, our concern is further civilian casualties, especially since ISIL has allegedly used civilians as human shields. The Emergency Relief Coordinator noted last month that military actors must do everything in their power to ensure that civilians caught up in the fighting are protected. The United Nations and its partners are responding to those who have been displaced, and we are ready to provide support in Raqqa city as soon as access and security conditions allow.

The health situation, particularly the low availability of trauma-care services, is a major concern in view of the intense fighting and shifting front lines. We continue to engage with relevant parties and actors on the ground to ensure that medical care be made available to those who need it, but a lot more needs to be done.

The situation at the berm on the Syrian-Jordanian border has also taken a worrying turn for the more than 50,000 Syrian civilians stranded there. On 18 July, the explosion of an improvised explosive device in Al-Rukban camp reportedly killed three children and injured five others. Reports indicate that the Syrian army is now surrounding the area on the Syrian side following field battles between it and non-State armed groups. Given the desperate security and humanitarian situation, it is crucial that humanitarian programming to the area be regular and uninterrupted. We are also working hard with partners to identify a solution for the people stranded in the berm area.

Let me now turn to the latest news concerning humanitarian access to besieged and hard-to-reach areas. Unfortunately, there is little positive news to report. There have been no convoys to besieged areas in July, although airdrops to Deir ez-Zor have continued. In terms of convoys to hard-to-reach areas, we have been down to one convoy per week for the month of July, while reaching more than 120,000 people in Yalda, Babila, Beit Sahem in rural Damascus, Al-Houle, Harbanifseh and Dar Kabira. Meanwhile, other humanitarian partners also delivered convoys from Damascus to hard-to-reach areas in July. That means that, under the United Nations June-July plan, we have thus far reached only more than a third of the 1 million people who were targeted.

The obstacles to convoys proceeding as planned are predictable, including the lack of approvals, facilitation letters from the Government of Syria and other administrative delays, as well as insecurity and fighting. At the same time, arbitrary restrictions imposed by some non-State armed groups, listed terrorist groups and self-designated local authorities also continue to obstruct access in various ways, especially in Idlib and the Eastern governorate of Syria. That means that, despite reductions in violence, we have not been able to noticeably increase our reach.

Despite the security and access challenges in reaching besieged and hard-to-reach areas, as well as the high threat posed to humanitarian workers, the United Nations and its partners continue to implement one of the largest humanitarian operations in the world

in Syria. Humanitarians continue to reach millions of people on a monthly basis. The latest and only available data as of May shows that humanitarians collectively reached 8.5 million people in a single month, including 4.4 million women and girls and 4.1 million men and boys with multisectoral assistance.

Of particular note is the beginning of the polio vaccination campaign this week by the World Health Organization, UNICEF and other health partners, which is targeting 450,000 children in Deir ez-Zor and Raqqa. Thus far, 27 polio cases have been confirmed. I call on all parties to ensure the safety of and access for the vaccination campaign teams. As members are aware, the polio virus respects no borders or any political, religious or security affiliations, and we must contain it.

This month marks the third anniversary of the adoption of resolution 2165 (2014). Since then, the modality has been a success with United Nations cross-border deliveries providing a lifeline for millions of people in nine governorates. With more than 15,000 trucks monitored and confirmed by the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism during this period for the integrity of their consignments without incident, the importance of United Nations cross-border operations is surely beyond question. As it remains a vital lifeline to so many need, that modality to deliver aid must be preserved during the coming months.

The conflict in Syria may be complex, but ensuring that people are protected and supported is our imperative as humanitarians and human beings. None of us should stand silent while civilians suffer and while fear tactics and the denial of food water, medical supplies, and other forms of aid are used as methods of war. What we and the Syrian people look to the Security Council and to the international community for today is that all parties uphold their basic obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law; that civilians are protected; that attacks on civilian infrastructure be stopped; that regular and unhindered access to all modalities, including medical supplies, be allowed; and that the horrific practice of siege end.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Ms. Mueller for her briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Ms. Ursula Mueller, for her comprehensive briefing. We reiterate our gratitude to her and her entire team for their ongoing efforts in Syria. They are always ready and willing to provide assistance, regardless of the difficult conditions on the ground.

Regrettably, despite those efforts, aid distribution has become increasingly sporadic, thereby preventing the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs from being able to carry out the duties entrusted to it. The ongoing fighting, security issues or — even more incomprehensibly — the lack of authorization by and the bureaucracy imposed by the Syrian Government all prevent humanitarian assistance from being provided to those who need it most. As we have noted on previous occasions, that is in no way the fault of OCHA but rather of the Security Council and the member States with influence over the parties to the conflict. To date, we have not been able to wield that influence effectively to ensure that all parties to the Syrian conflict grant unimpeded access to the humanitarian aid convoys.

For Uruguay, the protection of civilians in Syria, Yemen and in any other conflict is our top priority. Thus far, all conflicting parties in Syria have continued to ignore and violate that basic principle of international law. As often occurs in all such conflicts, the most vulnerable — including women, children and the elderly — have been and continue to be those most affected. That is why Uruguay has endorsed the establishment of an international impartial and independent mechanism to investigate serious violations of human rights law and international humanitarian law committed in Syria, including those that are considered to be war crimes, such as the use of chemical weapons on civilians.

Seeking justice for the hundreds of thousands of innocent victims of the conflict will be crucial to achieving lasting peace in Syria and to ensuring that the country and its entire population can overcome the horrors of this protracted war. It will also have a compelling effect on the future of the country. In the same vein, we support the request of Secretary-General António Guterres that events occurring in Syria be referred to the International Criminal Court.

For several months now, the priorities in Syria have been clearly defined. The Council is duty-bound to produce results in order to give hope to the Syrian people that the war is ending; those who have committed atrocities since 2011 will be held accountable and that a new kind of political climate will emerge in order to rectify the effects of many years of divisions and clashes that have left a trail of death and destruction for the country and its people. Until it has been achieved, the primary goal is and should continue to be a political solution that would put an end to the crisis and lead to a peaceful transition in Syria, negotiated by all Syrians, mediated by the United Nations and supported by the entire international community. We trust in the good offices of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura in his efforts to translate into concrete steps the road map outlined in resolution 2254 (2015) in order to achieve that goal.

The second goal must be to reduce the levels of violence and allow for the cessation of hostilities throughout the majority of the country. The Astana process, which is playing a very positive role, complements the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva and has already achieved considerable progress. We are also pleased that the United States, Russia and Jordan have been able to broker an agreement on a ceasefire in south-western Syria, which has seen a spike in violence over the past few months. We support the efforts of the three guarantor countries and encourage them to continue working to finalize the details of the implementation of the ceasefire in the four safe zones and in other parts of the country that may be added subsequently.

Nonetheless, for the third consecutive month, we must voice our concern about the continued lack of information on the implementation of the memorandum signed on 4 May, in particular given the fact that, to date, neither the United Nations nor humanitarian aid has been granted unhindered access to those areas. That, however, would give some assurance that the essential principles of international humanitarian law are being respected, such as humanitarian access, the prohibition of forced displacement, and freedom of movement so that people can freely enter and leave those areas.

The third goal, which is as equally important as the political transition process and the cessation of hostilities, is clearly humanitarian access. We would like to receive more encouraging news but it is clear that we remain far from any promising outcome that would ease the suffering of the millions of Syrian civilians who depend on that aid to survive each day. We will continue therefore to call for the immediate, sustained and unhindered access of humanitarian aid to all besieged and hard-to-reach areas. Nonetheless, the top priority must be to lift all unjustifiable sieges.

We must mention that is has been over a year since the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), and yet attacks on hospitals and health centres in Syria continue. In June alone, four incidents at such centres were reported. It is shocking that the parties continue to ignore the provisions of resolution 2286 (2016), thereby depriving millions of people of their right to medical attention, leaving hundreds of victims among medical and health-care personnel. Such acts constitute serious violations of international humanitarian law and war crimes. Clashes and indiscriminate attacks continue to cause damage to civilian infrastructure, which is on the brink of collapse after years of bombing. We condemn such attacks in Syria, Yemen and wherever they occur.

In conclusion, Uruguay asserts that the full and effective implementation of measures such as the consolidation of the cessation of hostilities, the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure and administrative procedures that allow for humanitarian access to be granted could all make a major difference in the lives of the Syrian people, who, month after month, demand that the Council take concrete and effective action on the ground.

With regard to the de-escalation zones that would allow for the temporary cessation of attacks, Uruguay maintains that it is very important for those zones to be temporary so as to preserve the unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. As we have previously mentioned, it is therefore imperative, as soon as possible, to honour commitments that place emphasis on the humanitarian situation. We trust that the Security Council can overcome its differences and shoulder its responsibilities in the area of international peace and security.

Mr. Llorentty Soliz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Bolivia thanks Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for her briefing. We again reiterate our firm support as she conducts her duties.

Bolivia would like to highlight the efforts made by Russia, Iran and Turkey as the guarantor countries

of the ceasefire in Syria. We also highlight the Astana meeting held on 4 May as a step forward, through the establishment of four de-escalation zones to prevent further incidents, put an immediate end to armed clashes and allow for improved and unconditional provision of humanitarian aid. We call for the Astana agreement and resolution 2336 (2016) of 30 December 2016 to be fully implemented, as long as dangerous and hard-to reach areas exist.

According to the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 13.5 million people already have been forced to leave their homes in search of security. Many of them are minors and therefore are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross, 6.6 million people have been displaced internally, 4.6 million live in areas that are difficult to access and are constantly being attacked, not to mention that after six years of ongoing violence approximately 5 million people have had to take refuge in neighbouring countries. To date, more than half of the population has been forced to leave their homes. We emphasize, as Ms. Mueller did, our thanks to the countries that are hosting refugees.

Despite the ceasefire agreements, ongoing attacks have resulted in the deaths of a considerable number of civilians, and women and children are always the most affected. We are alarmed that these attacks are also being directed at civilian infrastructure, such as homes, schools and hospitals where lives can be saved. Bolivia, a peace-loving country, insists that the ceasefire agreements must be implemented and respected. We reiterate, at the same time, the obligation that all parties that are involved have to guarantee the security and integrity of those who are trapped in the conflict. In this regard, we once again remind the parties involved in the conflict that they must provide unconditional access for humanitarian assistance and guarantee and protect the security and integrity of that assistance and not identify the humanitarian assistance convoys as military targets. We also call for the intensification of efforts to ensure access to areas that are besieged and hard to access in line with international humanitarian law.

As long as military tactics are given priority over politics, there can be no lasting peace and civilians, in particular women and children, will continue to be exposed to violence, the lack of humanitarian access and the lack of basic services. We reiterate our most heartfelt thanks to the work being done by the staff at the various humanitarian agencies, whose personnel are putting their own lives on the line to provide food and nutrition and medical supplies as well as assistance to alleviate the crisis undergone by the Syrian people. We call on the parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law and the risky work being carried out by the staff on the ground.

We commend the work being carried out by the Russian Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic both to ensure security in the deployment of humanitarian assistance and in evacuating people from areas where armed clashes have broken out.

We express, once again, our vigorous condemnation of all terrorism. It is criminal and unjustifiable regardless of the reason for it or where or when or by whom it is carried out. We reaffirm that all States must fight this scourge using all peaceful means at our disposal and the Charter of the United Nations and other international instruments.

In that regard, we condemn the terrorist attacks against the Russian Embassy in Damascus on 24 and 25 June. The Plurinational State of Bolivia firmly believes that the creation of more de-escalation zones should continue to be pursued so that humanitarian assistance for the civilian population can be extended. In this regard, we welcome the ceasefire in the south-west of Syria, agreed on the 7 July, between Russia, the United States and Jordan, as well as the work carried out in Cairo and Moscow forums.

Finally, the only way to resolve this conflict is through an inclusive and orderly political process that is led by and for the Syrian people. We therefore reaffirm our support for the advances made at the Astana and Geneva meetings. We have high hopes that this dialogue will lead to a lasting peace.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Government of my country has read the forty-first monthly report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/623). We note that certain parts of the report are somewhat different from previous reports. Nonetheless, we regret that, yet again, the authors of the report have overlooked the real reasons for the deterioration

of the living conditions of Syrian citizens. The report also ignores the real obstacles that are preventing humanitarian assistance from reaching those who need it. Foremost among them are the following.

First is the extremely critical security situation as a result of the terrorism of Da'esh, the Al-Nusra Front and associated groups, entities and individuals. In addition, there has been infighting among these armed terrorist groups for a while now. They are the ones who are impeding humanitarian convoys access, mining the roads used by convoys or failing to agree to monitor crossing points.

Secondly, coercive unilateral economic measures are being imposed by the United States, the European Union and other States. These measures affect first and foremost the Syrian people and, as a result, have seriously impacted humanitarian conditions in Syria, including basic services, such as health care, water, electricity and education. The logistical difficulties are enormous and prevent us from implementing the humanitarian plans. For example, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent has very few trucks and lacks fuel, not to mention the air strikes carried out by the United States targeting power stations, water stations and other infrastructure.

Thirdly, the Governments of donor countries have reneged on the pledges about which they brag at international conferences from which the Syrian Government is completely excluded, even though it is the primary party concerned. This is why current humanitarian financing is only 21 per cent of what is needed. This is a major obstacle, yet it is completely ignored by the authors of the report.

Fourthly, certain regional and international parties are continuously intervening in Syrian affairs in a negative way, with a view to achieving their destructive agendas, prolonging the Syrian crisis and obstructing efforts aimed at reaching a peaceful political resolution through a Syrian-led political process, without foreign intervention, which the United Nations has repeatedly endorsed. I know whereof I speak. As representatives are aware, I was away for three months during which time I was deeply involved in the Astana and Geneva processes. I know very well who was impeding the agreements in Astana and Geneva.

Today we are meeting to discuss the forty-first report. We have been engaging in this monthly exercise for three and a half years now. We continue to read reports that are clearly lacking in expertise and professionalism. We have also listened to malicious briefings, once from Amman and others from Beirut and Geneva, yet we have not heard no briefing from the United Nations representatives in Damascus. These reports contradict the noble humanitarian objectives that are supposed to be achieved through a process that can succeed only with cooperation, coordination and humanitarian partnership that are free from any political consideration, between the Syrian Government, on the one hand, and the United Nations, on the other.

I would like to refer to what Ms. Mueller said a while ago from Amman. In all her briefings, she has never mentioned the least form of cooperation with the Syrian Government. Not once has she mentioned any cooperation whatsoever with the Syrian Government. She mentioned aid that she had provided to 8 million people. In other words, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) had helped 8 million people, but where did this happen? Did it happen on Mars or perhaps on Jupiter? She noted that she had provided humanitarian aid that reached millions of different people. Perhaps on the planet Venus, where there is no Government. She did not say that she had carried out these positive activities in cooperation with the Syrian Government. OCHA would not have been able to do that without the cooperation of the Syrian Government. However, she did not mention a word about any cooperation of the Syrian Government with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other United Nations agencies.

This what we mean when we say there has been lack of professionalism and maturity with regard to the United Nations reports on the humanitarian situation in Syria. We want a humanitarian partnership between our Government and the Office. OCHA cannot replace the Syrian Government. We will not allow that to happen . Ms. Mueller also said: "[W]e and the Syrian people look to the Security Council [to ensure] that civilians are protected". Who gave Ms. Mueller the right to speak on behalf of the Syrian people? How could she overstep her mandate and say that she and the Syrian people ask the Security Council to provide protection for civlians? How dare she say that before the Security Council?

I am sure that, regrettably, the monthly reports have deliberately been diverted from their objective. These reports are misused. Instead of trying to help us to overcome the difficulties that prevent humanitarian aid from reaching those who need it, these reports are

used to slander the Syrian Government and to apply pressure to the Syrian Government and its allies in the fight against terrorism. They are just a cover to channel humanitarian aid convoys to armed terrorist groups instead of reaching the Syrian people who need them, with a view to prolonging the crisis and boosting the morale of terrorists who use civilians as human shields.

Ms. Mueller cast doubt even on the fact that terrorists are using civilians as human shields, when she said that terrorists had allegedly used civilians as human shields". "Allegedly". Can she really say these are allegations after all these scandals in Mosul, Aleppo, Homs, Palmyra and Raqqa. Ms. Mueller is still unconvinced that Da'esh used civilians as human shields. She has allegations. She received allegations.

The Syrian Government spares no effort to assume its responsibilities to improve the living conditions of Syrian citizens without discrimination. However, United Nations officials with mandates in the humanitarian process, particularly in OCHA, have persistently refused to enter into a genuine humanitarian partnership with the Syrian Government. They have opted for the logic of anonymity, for demolishing the bridges of mutual cooperation and trust and for questioning its credibility as a humanitarian partner whose cooperation is inescapable in order to implement the humanitarian response plans.

In that regard, with the permission of the Under-Secretary-General and Ms. Mueller, I would like to present documented information for the official record. We as a Government take responsibility for this information, to the effect that there are officials of international and United Nations agencies working on the ground in Syria who prefer to distance themselves from the contents of the monthly reports of the Secretary-General with respect to the activities of their agencies in Syria. Those agencies have confirmed to us that they had not provided the reported information to OCHA. Those agencies have even rejected the inclusion of this information in the monthly reports in such a negative and fragmented way because it does not reflect the true nature of the coordination and effective cooperation with the Syrian Government on the delivery of humanitarian assistance. That is what we hear from United Nations representatives in Damascus.

Moreover, those international and United Nations officials have affirmed that some OCHA officials encourage those agencies to not cooperate with the Syrian Government. OCHA seems to be saying that it does not need the Syrian Government in order to carry out its humanitarian work, as if the Office were working on another planet or doing its humanitarian assistance work on Mars. It goes without saying that this contradicts the obligations of OCHA towards the Syrian Government under Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014). In that regard, my Government draws the attention of the authors of the report to the fact that the criticism of national reconciliation sends a message of support to terrorists and their financiers because this reconciliation is intended to end the suffering of millions of people who have been used as human shields by terrorists for several years now.

The national character of such reconciliation is based on the following. We offer the opportunity to all armed persons to regularize their situation, surrender their weapons and either remain with their families in their homes or to leave the area included in the reconciliation agreement and relocate elsewhere. We have made this offer without the slightest pressure on the civilians living in those areas. That has allowed a number of families to return to their homes and to live normal lives. Does that cause concern to the authors of the report? Is it not something that they should instead encourage and even be positively involved in?

With respect to criticizing the reconciliation, the authors of the report had no qualms about rejecting any direct accusation of the aircraft of the so-called international coalition led by the United States. The coalition uses incendiary weapons, causing the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians, as well as the destruction of infrastructure, including dams, bridges, hospitals, schools, development institutions of the Syrian people and the economic resources which it needs for reconstruction. I note in particular wells, and gas and oil infrastructure.

I would also like to mention the massacres of civilians in the cities of Mayadin and Al-Bukamal in May. I would also mention attacks in the villages of Sur and Dablan, the region of Mayadin, the village of Ziban on the outskirts of Deir ez-Zor in late June, Tal al-Shayer on 19 June, Zayanat village on 4 July, and the village of Kishkish, in southern rural Hasakah province, on 12 July. Those are just a few examples.

I should like to put a question to the authors of this report and to all of United Nations officials on

Syrian soil. Are not these losses in human life, which run into the thousands, as well as the losses to Syrian infrastructure, which have cost us billions of dollars, the result of the barbaric bombings of the so-called international coalition and a cause of the suffering of the Syrian people? Should not those figures be included in detail in the monthly reports? Should not the United Nations take the initiative to pay compensation to Syrian civilians who have lost their homes, their farms, their factories and their schools, which the children who have been killed can no longer attend? Who will pay the cost of all the losses inflicted by this international coalition on Syrian power and water stations, dams, bridges and oil and gas facilities?

The Government of Syria would like to ensure that the realities concerning the implementation of the distribution plan for humanitarian aid are clearly understood, especially for some of the more unstable regions. To that end, my Government has sent many messages to the Secretary-General, the Security Council and the United Nations Office in Geneva, presenting statistics and precise figures on the humanitarian convoys, with the help of our national humanitarian partners. However, the authors of the report and the representatives of OCHA continue to tamper with those numbers under an agenda that seeks to pressure my Government and in fact blackmail it. We want to know how it is that the authors of the report speak of only two humanitarian convoys since the beginning of this year, when the facts and figures clearly show that 48 such convoys have been able to reach their destinations since the beginning of 2017. That is an enormous difference. The report says that two convoys have reached areas that are very hard to reach, to the benefit of 412,580 families. We say that there were 48 such convoys. I repeat, 48 humanitarian convoys, not two as stated in the report.

The report also mentions 11 besieged areas. The Government of my country reaffirms that terrorist groups are responsible for the siege of these towns. Those groups are besieging these towns inside and out, preventing access to them, using civilians in those areas as human shields, and denying civilians access to food, medical and humanitarian aid. In fact, they are selling those items to civilians at exorbitant prices, which many cannot afford.

What happened in eastern Aleppo is still fresh in our minds. We all remember that after the city was liberated, thousands of tons of food and medical supplies were discovered to have been stored in areas controlled by terrorist groups in eastern Aleppo. That scenario is happening again today in other areas, especially in eastern Ghouta, outside Damascus. In spite of all that, the authors of the report, shockingly, have apparently seen none of what has been happening in these areas, except what is negative and questionable, while turning a blind eye to what is real and positive.

There have also been accusations that the Syrian Government has been confiscating medical equipment. In this regard, the Government of my country stresses that the items that have been confiscated are either used for complex surgeries sent to areas where there are no hospitals and no specialized medical personnel to perform such surgeries, or that the number of civilians in those areas and the amounts of medical equipment sent to them are sometimes disproportionate. I note in this regard that the Syrian Government has sometimes responded to calls to evacuate the injured from regions considered by the United Nations to be besieged or hard to reach, removing them to Government hospitals where the medical infrastructure is better and they can receive the care they need.

On the other hand, the staff of OCHA have procrastinated and delayed implementing the procedures they need to take in order to dispatch the humanitarian convoys. They have even refused to send these convoys to many areas that deserve aid and need help. They have focused on areas where armed terrorist groups are located and abandoned the regions where those groups are absent. For instance, the Fu'ah and Kafraya areas have both been under siege by the Al-Nusra Front and other terrorist groups for the past three and a half years. Despite that, the United Nations has stopped sending humanitarian convoys to either town — and I am talking about 7,000 Syrian citizens who are in need of that aid. That has been the case ever since the so-called Four Towns Agreement came to an end several months ago. I would therefore like to ask the Security Council, which is convened today to discuss the humanitarian situation in my country, Syria, to take every measure necessary to end the suffering of those two villages, which are under siege by armed terrorist groups seeking to commit genocide by shelling, sniping and starvation, similar to what we saw in the 15 April bombing of Rashidin, in which, Council members will recall, more than 120 women and children were killed.

In conclusion, I must emphasize that the noble goal of the humanitarian operation in Syria is to save the lives

of millions of Syrians suffering from the effects of the crisis and the terrorist war that has been waged on my country for the past seven years. Its success therefore depends on establishing a genuine humanitarian partnership and measures that engender mutual trust and transparency between the Syrian Government and the United Nations. I hope that when the next report is published, the Security Council will be able to hear from representatives of United Nations agencies who are actually on Syrian territory.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The representative of the United States has asked for the floor to make a statement.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): In response to the last speaker's statement, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Assistant Secretary-General Mueller and the dedicated and brave teams of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the United Nations agencies. They and their implementing partners on the ground are saving lives and helping the Syrian people every day, while the Syrian Government continues to terrorize its people and cause unimaginable suffering. OCHA has our support.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

As this is the last scheduled meeting of the Security Council for the month of July, before adjourning the meeting I would like to express the delegation of China's sincere appreciation to the members of the Council, especially my colleagues the Permanent Representatives and their staffs, and to the secretariat of the Council, for all the support they have given us.

It has indeed been a busy month, and one in which we rallied to achieve consensus on several important issues within our purview. We could not have done it alone or without the hard work, support and positive contributions of every delegation and the representatives of the secretariat, as well as all the relevant conference service officers, interpreters and translators. As we end our presidency, I know I speak on behalf of the Council in wishing the delegation of Egypt good luck for the month of August.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.10 a.m.